L. A. Gordon

A

DEFENCE

OF

REVEALED RELIGION,

IN

TWO SERMONS,

PREACHED IN

THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH

OF

LANDAFF;

AND

A CHARGE,

DELIVERED TO

THE CLERGY OF THAT DIOCESE,

IN JUNE, 1795.

SECOND EDITION.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following diſcourſes are publiſhed, in compliance with the united requeſt of the principal clergy and laity, before whom they were delivered. They aſſured me, that, at this conjuncture, a publication of them would be peculiarly uſeful in my dioceſe. If this their partiality of judgment (for ſuch I muſt eſteem it) ſhould in fact be verified in any degree, I ſhall have no reaſon to regret my having yielded to a ſolicitation urged by ſuch reſpectable authority, and in the moſt obliging manner. At all events, I intreat the inhabitants of my dioceſe to accept this publication, as a ſmall proof of my ſincere deſire to promote, according to my poor ability, their ſpiritual welfare. I have no place of reſidence amongſt them; but I have not, I truſt, during any part of the thirteen years in which I have been connected with them, been unmindful of the duties of my ſtation.

R. L.

Landaff, July 2d, 1795.

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A CHARGE,

Delivered to the Clergy of the Dioceſe of Landaff, in June 1795.

SERMON I.

COL. II. 8.

BEWARE LEST ANY MAN SPOIL YOU THROUGH PHILOSOPHY.

THIS apoſtolic benediction is peculiarly applicable to the age in which we live. It has been called—the age of philoſophy—the age of reaſon: if by reaſon and philoſophy, irreligion be underſtood, it undoubtedly merits the appellation; for there never was an age ſince the death of Chriſt, never one ſince the commencement of the hiſtory of the world, in which atheiſm and infidelity have been more generally profeſſed. Nature and reaſon have been proclaimed as gods, feſtivals have been inſtituted in honour of abſtract ideas, and all revealed religion has been ſcoffingly rejected as a

ſyſtem of ſtatecraft and prieſtcraft, as a groſs impoſition on the underſtanding of mankind.

This impious fever of the mind, this paralyſis of human intellect, originated in a neighbouring nation; it's contagion has been induſtriouſly introduced, and is rapidly ſpreading in our own; it becomes us all in our ſeveral ſtations to endeavour to ſtop it's progreſs; for of this we may all be well aſſured, that when religion ſhall have loſt it's hold on men's conſciences, government will loſe it's authority over their perſons, and a ſtate of barbarous anarchy will enſue.

I know it has been made a queſtion both in ancient and modern times—whether a ſociety of atheiſts could ſubſiſt. This is no queſtion with me, I think it could not. Many ſpeculative opinions, in every ſyſtem of religion, are of little conſequence to the ſafety of the community, and, in all well regulated ſtates, they are left to the free diſcuſſion of thoſe, who think themſelves intereſted, as advocates for truth, in defending

ing or oppoſing them; but atheiſm ſeems to be irreconcileably hoſtile, not only to the peace, but to the very exiſtence of civil ſociety. If there be no God, there can be no puniſhment for any crime, except what is denounced againſt it by the laws of the land, or what is connected with it by the laws of nature; and theſe are reſtraints incapable of controling the ſelfiſh and licentious paſſions of human kind. He who removes from the mind of man the hopes and fears of futurity, opens the floodgates of immorality, and lets in a deluge of vices and crimes, deſtructive alike of the dignity of human nature, and of the tranquillity of the world. There never yet hath exiſted, and there never can exiſt, a nation without religion. If chriſtianity be aboliſhed, paganiſm, mahometaniſm, ſome religious impoſture or other muſt be introduced in it's ſtead, or civil ſociety muſt be given up. But in the opinion of *Bacon*, (a philoſopher with whom our modern philoſophers cannot be compared) "there hath not in any age been diſcovered any philoſophy, opinion, religion, law, or diſcipline, which ſo greatly exalts the common, and leſſens individual

intereſt, as the chriſtian religion doth;" ſo that I know not which moſt to admire and deplore, their wickedneſs as men, or their weakneſs as ſtateſmen, who have attempted to govern mankind without religion, and to eſtabliſh ſociety on the ruins of chriſtianity.

The time, uſually allotted to diſcourſes from this place, will not allow me to refute, at length, the atheiſtic tenets, or to anſwer the deiſtic objections, which have been ſo recently propagated to the downfal of one nation, and to the danger of all; I will, however, crave your patience, whilſt I ſtate ſome arguments of importance, in oppoſition to the principles of thoſe philoſophers, who have been the authors of this miſchief in a foreign country, and of their admirers in our own.

Nature and reaſon, they tell us, are their gods. Let them not impoſe upon themſelves and others by the uſe of words, the meaning of which they do not underſtand. What is nature? what is reaſon?—theſe terms ought to be defined, for there is

cauſe

cauſe to ſuſpect, that men who introduce, or who adopt ſuch impiety of expreſſion, are rather ignorant of what atheiſm is, than that they are, what they affect to be thought, atheiſts on conviction. By nature then we may underſtand, the order and conſtitution of things compoſing the univerſe—and by reaſon, that faculty of the human mind by which we are able to diſcover truth.—And can it be thought, that this ſyſtem of things, conſiſting of an infinity of parts fitted to anſwer ends which human wiſdom can never comprehend in their full extent, but which, as far as it can comprehend them, appear to be beneficial to man and all other percipient beings—can it be thought, that this ſyſtem had not an intelligent, benevolent, powerful Author?

When a man makes a watch, builds a ſhip, erects a ſilk-mill, conſtructs a teleſcope, we do not ſcruple to ſay, that the man has a deſign in what he does. And can we ſay, that this ſolar ſyſtem, a thouſand times more regular in all it's motions than watches, ſhips, or ſilk-mills—that the infinity of other ſyſtems diſperſed through the immenſity of

ſpace, inconceivably ſurpaſſing in magnitude and complication of motion, this, of which our earth is but a minute part—or even that the eye which now reads what is here written, a thouſand times better fitted for it's function than any teleſcope—can we ſay, that there was no deſign in the formation of theſe things?

Tell us not, that it is allowed there muſt be intelligence in an artificer who makes a watch or a teleſcope, but that, as to the Artificer of the univerſe, we cannot comprehend his nature. What then, ſhall we on that account deny his exiſtence? With better reaſon might a grub, buried in the bowels of the earth, deny the exiſtence of a man, whoſe nature it cannot comprehend; for a grub is indefinitely nearer to man in all intellectual endowments (if the expreſſion can be permitted), than man is to his Maker.—With better reaſon may we deny the exiſtence of an intellectual faculty in the man who makes a machine; we know not the nature of the man; we ſee not the mind which contrives the figure, ſize, and adaptation of the ſeveral parts; we ſimply

ſee

ſee the hand which forms and puts them together.

Shall a ſhipwrecked mathematician, on obſerving a geometrical figure accurately deſcribed on the ſand of the ſea-ſhore, encourage his followers with ſaying, "Let us hope for the beſt, for I ſee the traces of men;"—and ſhall not man, in contemplating the ſtructure of the univerſe, or of any part of it, ſay to the whole human race—Brethren! be of good comfort, we are not begotten of chance, we are not born of atoms, our progenitors have not come into exiſtence by crawling out of the mud of the Nile, behold the footſteps of a Being powerful, wiſe, and good—not nature, but the God of nature, the Father of the univerſe!

I will not entangle the underſtanding of my audience, or bewilder mine own, in the labyrinths of metaphyſical reſearches; but I muſt ſay to theſe—the great philoſophers of the age—you ought to know, that matter cannot have been from eternity—and that if, with *Plato*, you contend for the eternity of matter, you ought to know, that

motion cannot have been from eternity —and that if, with *Ariſtotle*, you contend for the eternity of motion, you ought to know, that with him alſo you muſt contend for the eternity of a firſt mover—you muſt introduce, what you labour to exclude, a God, cauſing, regulating, and preſerving, by eſtabliſhed laws, the motion of every particle of matter in the univerſe.

You affirm that nature is your God, and you inform us that the energy of nature is the cauſe of every thing—that nature has power to produce a man.—In all this you ſeem to ſubſtitute the term nature for what we underſtand by the term God. But when you tell us that nature acts (if ſuch exertion can be called action) neceſſarily and without intelligence, we readily acknowledge that your God is eſſentially different from our God. "All novelty is but oblivion;" this famous *ſyſtem of nature*, which has excited ſo much unmerited attention, and done ſuch incredible miſchief throughout Europe, is in little or in nothing different from the ſyſtem of certain atheiſtic philoſophers mentioned by *Cicero*, who maintained, that

"nature

"nature was a certain energy, deſtitute of intelligence, exciting in bodies neceſſary motions."—The anſwer is obvious and ſhort—an energy deſtitute of freedom and of intelligence cannot produce a man poſſeſſing both; as well may it be ſaid, that an effect may be produced without a cauſe.

The proof of the exiſtence of a Supreme Being, which is derived from the conſtitution of the viſible world, is of a popular caſt; but you muſt not therefore ſuppoſe it to be calculated to convince only perſons who cannot reaſon philoſophically. What think you of *Newton?* He certainly could reaſon philoſophically. He certainly, of all the ſons of men, beſt underſtood the ſtructure of the univerſe; and he eſteemed that ſtructure to be ſo irrefragable a proof of the exiſtence and providence of an almighty, wiſe, and good Architect of nature, that he never pronounced the word—God—without a pauſe.—What think you of *Cotes*—ſecond in ſublimity of philoſophic genius to none but *Newton?*—"That man," ſays he, "muſt be blind, who, from the moſt wiſe and excellent diſpoſal of things, cannot immediately

diately perceive the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of their almighty Creator; and he muſt be mad, who refuſes to acknowledge them."

The argument, which I have been hitherto inſiſting upon, may be called a natural argument for the Being of God, as it is taken from the contemplation of nature; I proceed to another of great weight, which may be called an hiſtorical argument, as it is grounded on teſtimony concerning paſt tranſactions.

That this world has not been from eternity, but that it was either created from nothing, or fitted up by the Supreme Being for the habitation of man, a few thouſand years ago—that it was afterwards deſtroyed by an univerſal deluge, brought upon it by the ſame Being—that it has been repeopled by the deſcendants of three men, who eſcaped the general deſtruction—theſe things are either ancient facts, or ancient fables—if they are facts, both atheiſm and infidelity muſt be given up—and that they are facts and not fables, might, if time would permit,

be

be ſatisfactorily proved from a detailed examination of the hiſtory of every nation in the world.

The credible annals of all nations, not excepting Egypt or Chaldea, China or India, fall ſhort of the deluge.—The annals of all nations, ancient and modern, barbarous and civilized, ſpeak of a deluge as of a dreadful cataſtrophe which had deſtroyed human kind, through the interpoſition of a ſuperior Being offended by the vices of the world.—The annals of all nations bear witneſs to the exiſtence of a God who had created all things, for even in the time of *Ariſtotle* there was, as he obſerves, "an ancient tradition (he does not ſay a deduction of reaſon, but a report or tradition) which all men had derived from their anceſtors, that all things were from God, and that by God all things did conſiſt."—(εκ τȣ Θεȣ τα παντα, και δια Θεȣ ημιν συνεςηκεν. Ariſt. de Mund. Cr.)—Remarkable words theſe! and analogous to thoſe of *St. Paul*, ſpeaking of Chriſt, and, as is generally thought, of the creation of the material world, "All things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things,

things, and by him all things conſiſt." (τα παντα δι αυτου και εις αυτον εκτισται, και αυτος εστι προ παντων, και τα παντα εν αυτω συνεστηκε. Col. i. 17.)

He who has employed moſt time in examining the hiſtory of remote ages, will be moſt convinced of the truth of the following propoſitions—that profane authors derived their notions of a Supreme Being from patriarchal tradition—that they corrupted this tradition—that the bible is the only book in the world in which this tradition is preſerved in it's original purity—that this invaluable book throws light upon the origin and ancient hiſtory of every nation in the world—and that the hiſtory of the Jews, contained in the bible, and connected with their hiſtory to the preſent time, is the ſtrongeſt proof which can be brought, not only againſt atheiſm, but againſt that ſpecies of deiſm which contends, that God never viſibly interpoſed in the government of the Jewiſh nation.

When it is ſaid that the annals of all nations fall ſhort of the deluge, it muſt be underſtood, that the nation of the Jews is excepted.

excepted. I look upon that people with aſtoniſhment and reverence; they are living proofs of facts moſt ancient and moſt intereſting to mankind. Where do we meet with an Aſſyrian, Perſian, Grecian, Roman, corroborating, by his teſtimony, any one of the events mentioned in the hiſtory of their reſpective empires? But we meet with millions of Jews in every quarter, and in every country of the world, who acknowledge not only the exiſtence of a God, as other nations do—but that he is the very God who enabled Moſes to work miracles in Egypt; who delivered to him that law which they now obſerve; who called Abraham, the father of their nation, from the midſt of his idolatrous kinſmen; who preſerved Noah and his family in the ark; who formed Adam out of the duſt of the earth; who created all things by the word of his power.

Wherever we have a Jew on the ſurface of the earth, there we have a man, whoſe teſtimony and whoſe conduct connect the preſent time with the beginning of all time. He now believes, and he declares that all his progenitors have conſtantly believed, the

hiſtory

hiſtory contained in the book of Moſes to be a true hiſtory—he now obeys the laws which God gave to Moſes above three thouſand years ago—now practiſes the circumciſion which God enjoined to Abraham—now obſerves the paſſover in commemoration of the mercy vouchſafed to his nation when God deſtroyed the firſt-born throughout the land of Egypt—now keeps holy the ſeventh day, on which God reſted from the works of the creation. When nations inſtitute rites to preſerve the memory of great events, the uniform obſervance of the rite authorizes us to admit the certainty of the fact. The Jews have for thouſands of years (and the patriarchs, before the Jews, probably did the ſame) obſerved a very ſignificant rite in commemoration of the creation; and another in commemoration of their preſervation from one of the plagues of Egypt: why ſhould we heſitate to admit the certainty of theſe events? Adam lived with Methuſelah 240 years, Methuſelah lived with Shem the ſon of Noah 98 years, and Shem lived with Abraham 150 years: what apprehenſion can we reaſonably entertain that the account of the creation could either have been forged or miſre-

misrepresented, when it had passed through so few hands before it reached the founder of the Jewish nation?

But I have already gone beyond the limit I had prescribed to myself in this argument, I cannot pursue it farther; sceptical men, however, will do well to consider the nature and weight of historic evidence, not only for the existence of God, but for his having made a revelation of himself to the Jewish nation. Let them examine the matter freely and fully, and I cannot but believe that they will come to the following conclusions—that the creation is a fact—that the deluge is a fact—that the re-peopling the world by the descendants of Noah is a fact—that the Jewish theocracy is a fact—and that these facts may be established, as all past transactions of great antiquity must be, by the authority of history, and especially by the history of the Jews, whom God appears to have constituted witnesses of his existence and providence to all nations in all ages. Of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, Tyrians, and of other nations, God hath made, or will make, a *full end; but the seed of*

Israel

Iſrael ſhall not ceaſe from being a nation before him for ever.

If the refutation of atheiſm and deiſm be ſo eaſy and certain as I have here ſtated it to be, whence comes it that there are now ſo many, or that there ever were any either atheiſts, or unbelievers in the truth of the Jewiſh and Chriſtian diſpenſations? I put theſe diſpenſations together, becauſe thoſe amongſt us (I ſpeak not of the Jews), who deny or admit the divine miſſion of Moſes, will deny alſo or admit the divine miſſion of Jeſus Chriſt.

There are many cauſes of infidelity, ſuch as—profligacy of manners, which induces men to hope that religion may not be true—want of ſerious attention to the proofs on which it is eſtabliſhed—haſty concluſions that, becauſe ſome religions have been proved to be impoſtures, all are ſo—ſuperſtitious ceremonies and revolting doctrines, which are, in many parts of chriſtendom, pertinaciouſly maintained as parts of chriſtianity—intolerance, ſecularity, hypocriſy, conſpicuous in the lives of chriſtians—theſe and other cauſes

of

of infidelity might be enlarged upon at great length, but I will only beg your attention to one other, leſs obvious, and leſs general, but more dangerous than any of thoſe which I have mentioned—more dangerous, inaſmuch as it operates chiefly on the minds of men of the moſt cultivated and enlarged underſtandings, I mean—miſtaken piety.

That the Creator and Governor of the univerſe, who endureth through eternity, and filleth immenſity; that this Almighty Being, who hath diſtributed innumerable ſyſtems of material worlds through the profundity of ſpace, and hath, probably, repleniſhed them all with percipient beings, capable of enjoying the happineſs which his goodneſs hath wiſely allotted to their reſpective ſtations; that this ſelf-exiſtent, uncauſed cauſe of all Being, whom no language can deſcribe, no thought can comprehend, ſhould at ſundry times and in divers inſtances have ſuſpended the laws of nature which he had eſtabliſhed, viſited in an extraordinary manner this little globe, this atom of the univerſe, and by ſigns and wonders have made a re-

velation of his will to ſuch a worm as man—this appears to many men, of good lives and ſtrong minds, ſo ſtrange a fact, that they are perſuaded no human teſtimony can eſtabliſh it's credibility. They venerate the majeſty of the Supreme Being, they are perſuaded that all things were made by him, and that all things are ſuſtained by him; but they think that it derogates from the infinity of his wiſdom and of his power, to ſuppoſe things to have been at firſt ſo ill made, as to require his ſubſequent interpoſition to regulate or amend them.

Bleſſed God! what is this but making our ways thy ways, but meaſuring thy infinity by the ſtandard of our philoſophy? We know the difficulty of regulating the minute concerns of a kingdom, a province, or a family, by ſpecial interpoſitions of any one man's wiſdom or authority; and thence we ſimply infer, that the interpoſition of the Almighty in governing every part of the univerſe is a circumſtance not to be expected. We know that a machine of our conſtruction approaches to perfection in proportion

proportion as it wants not external aid to direct or preſerve it's motion, and thence we ſimply infer that the works of God, which cannot but be perfect in their kind, want not his interpoſition. Abſolute perfection belongs to God alone; in all the things which he hath made there is a gradation of excellence, each thing is as perfect as it's nature will admit:—now why may it not be the nature of man to admit indefinite improvement from divine inſtitution? It will be granted that man would be a more perfect Being than he is, if, on all occaſions, his paſſions were kept in ſubjection to his reaſon, if he was guilty of no impiety towards his Maker, of no uncharitableneſs towards his neighbour, of no violence towards himſelf in an intemperate indulgence of his appetites:—where then is the abſurdity of ſuppoſing, that God may have thought fit to ſtrengthen the reaſon and to weaken the paſſions of mankind by bringing *immortality to light*, by giving an actual example of a reſurrection from the dead, by promulgating the certainty of rewards and puniſhments in another ſtate?

Surely it is a miſtaken piety, which, from a ſublime idea of the Divine Eſſence, would exclude the Supreme Being from interfering in the works which he hath made, which would hinder him from ſtill working, till he hath brought all things to that perfection for which his goodneſs intended them. What that perfection is we know not; it muſt ever fall infinitely ſhort of the perfection of God himſelf, but it is not poſſible for us to ſay to what degree it may be advanced, or to point out the beſt means fitted to advance it to the degree predetermined in the councils of the Almighty. We cannot look into the depths of God's wiſdom, nor comprehend the ends he has in view, or the ways by which he effects them.

It is the not properly conſidering the extent of our capacity, the not clearly diſtinguiſhing the things to which our ideas are ſuited, from thoſe to which they are inadequate, that has made many men fall into an irkſome ſcepticiſm, ſome into actual infidelity, and a few into the madneſs of atheiſm.

For

For what purpoſe was I born?—in what courſe of actions does the felicity of my nature conſiſt?—am I author of theſe reputed actions, or am I a machine inceſſantly and irreſiſtibly impelled to action, by external motives over which I have no controul?—will my exiſtence be terminated by death, or continued beyond it?—will the quality of my future exiſtence (if there ſhould happen to be one) depend on my moral conduct here? Theſe and other queſtions of ſimilar import every man of reflection muſt, at one time or other, put to himſelf; and when he does put them, he will perceive that his reaſon is unequal to the clear ſolution of any of them. That Jeſus Chriſt was born in Judea near 1800 years ago—that he wrought miracles in that country—that he was crucified at Jeruſalem—that he aroſe from the dead—that he aſcended into heaven—that he enabled his diſciples to work miracles, and commanded them to teach the world the doctrines which he had taught them—theſe are ſome of the main facts on which the truth of the chriſtian religion is founded. Now it appears to me to be a much eaſier matter to prove the truth of theſe facts, than to give,

from reaſon, a ſatisfactory anſwer to any of the difficulties which I have mentioned.

In the ardour of youth, in the tumult of ſenſual paſſion, in the profligacy of diſſipation, in the buſtle of buſineſs, in the ſordidneſs of avarice, in the loftineſs of ambition, thoughts of ſuch a ſerious caſt may either not occur, or not be regarded. But they will obtrude themſelves on a bed of ſickneſs at any period of life; they will ſurround the pillow of the unfortunate; they will penetrate the receſſes of retirement, whether occaſioned by a ſatiety of enjoyment, the chagrin of diſappointment, or by any of the ſad viciſſitudes incident to every human ſtation; and if they ſhould arreſt our notice on no other occaſion, they will certainly ſteal upon us with the increaſe of our age, and generate, in thoſe who reject chriſtianity, no ſmall perturbation, when the feebleneſs of declining life moſt requires tranquillity and conſolation.

Be it our buſineſs then, as it is our duty and our intereſt, to confirm ourſelves in the belief of that goſpel by which all difficulties

culties of this nature are done away. If that goſpel be true, (as it certainly is,) we know for what purpoſe we are born—that we may live for ever. We know that we are not machines, but accountable for our actions, which machines cannot be. We know in what the felicity of our nature doth conſiſt — in living *ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* We know that death is not *eternal ſleep*, but the commencement of everlaſting life.

I conclude with recommending one obſervation to the ſerious attention of all unbelievers, who are ſincerely deſirous of becoming chriſtians—that they would well conſider the quality of the proof which the ſubject admits. The truth of the chriſtian religion is, as to us, founded on the reality of paſt tranſactions. Now paſt tranſactions are neither the objects of ſenſe, nor of intuition, nor of demonſtration; we cannot, correctly ſpeaking, be ſaid to know that they ever exiſted; but the probability, which is grounded on teſtimony, approaches, in many caſes, ſo near to certainty, that our belief of paſt tranſactions is little different

from knowledge itſelf. He who requires more than probability before he will embrace chriſtianity, requires what the nature of the ſubject does not admit, and ſubverts the foundation of all hiſtory, ſacred and profane. That Jeſus wrought miracles in Judea, and aroſe from the dead at Jeruſalem, are facts as capable of being aſcertained, and as worthy of being credited, as that Cæſar lived at Rome, and was murdered in the capitol.

May the merciful Father of the whole human race, who, for reaſons beſt known to his unſearchable wiſdom, hath ſuffered many millions to die, and ſuffers many millions alſo now to live, in utter ignorance of that revelation of his will, which he hath given to the chriſtian world, accept our humble thankſgivings for ſuch an ineſtimable benefit! May he *eſtabliſh, ſtrengthen, ſettle* the inhabitants of theſe kingdoms in the faith of Chriſt; and be graciouſly pleaſed to remove from all others the *ignorance that is in them*, leſt, *in being aliens from the commonwealth of Iſrael, ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe, having no hope and*

without

without God in the world, they become to every good work reprobate; leſt, *in being ſpoiled through philoſophy and vain deceit,* they fall into perdition, temporal and eternal.

SERMON

SERMON II.

2 PET. I. 16.

WE HAVE NOT FOLLOWED CUNNINGLY DEVISED FABLES, WHEN WE MADE KNOWN UNTO YOU THE POWER AND COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BUT WERE EYE-WITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY.

WHETHER the chriſtian religion be a revelation of the will of God, or a cunningly deviſed fable, is a queſtion which, one might think, every ſerious man would examine with impartial attention. He would take, it might be expected, the New Teſtament into his hand; and obſerving that it conſiſted of various parts, and had been written by different authors, he would inquire what evidence there was for it's being a *genuine* book. If he found, as I am perſuaded he would find, that there were as ſolid reaſons for believing that the goſpel of St. Luke, and the Acts of the Apoſtles, were

were written by him, and the other parts of the New Teſtament by the perſons to whom they are aſcribed, as that the hiſtory of the Peloponneſian war was written by Thucidydes, or the lives of the Cæſars by Suetonius; he would then inquire, whether the book was not only a genuine, but an *authentic* one; that is, whether it contained a narration of events which had really taken place in Judea, near eighteen hundred years ago, or whether there was any reaſonable cauſe to ſuſpect that the authors of the New Teſtament had not honeſtly related what had really happened. With reſpect to the honeſty of the writers, he would judge of that from their characters; and with reſpect to the reality of the facts mentioned by them, he would conſider, that moſt of the writers of the New Teſtament did not relate what they had heard, but what they had ſeen; ſo that, if they were honeſt men, there could remain no doubt of the truth of what they had delivered. He would be ready to admit, that, as ſimple hiſtorians, they might, notwithſtanding their honeſty, have fallen into trivial miſtakes in their narration of what they had ſeen; and that, notwithſtanding their honeſty,

they

they might have been full of credulity, and liable to impoſition; but he would think it quite impoſſible, that facts of ſuch public notoriety and importance as the life, death, and reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt, could have been the ſubjects either of human error, or credulity, in thoſe who profeſſed to have been eye-witneſſes of what they related. He would therefore certainly conclude, that the chriſtian religion was true, if the writers of the New Teſtament were honeſt men.

If the writers of the New Teſtament were not honeſt men, they were impoſtors: now that they were not impoſtors, may appear from conſidering—that they had neither motive to commence, nor ability to carry on an impoſture—and from examining the account they give of themſelves and of their aſſociates, immediately before, and ſoon after the reſurrection of Jeſus.

Impoſtors are moved to the attempt of deceiving mankind by proſpects of wealth, fame, power, pleaſure; by ſome real or imaginary advantage to be derived to themſelves, or, through them, to thoſe whom they

love

love and regard as themſelves. Now no expectation of this kind can, with the leaſt ſhadow of probability, be aſcribed to all, or to any of the writers of the New Teſtament. There is no need of entering into the proof of this; every one knows that Jews and Romans, Greeks and Barbarians; that the powers of the world, wherever they went, were againſt the apoſtles; they durſt not any where lift up ſo much as an arm in their own defence. Inſtead of temporal advantages of any kind, they had to expect, and they did in fact experience, hunger, and cold, and nakedneſs, and ſcorn, and contempt, and hatred, all the miſeries incident to a ſtate of poverty, all the calamities attendant on a ſtate of religious perſecution:—theſe are not the motives which induce men to become impoſtors.—Read the hiſtory of the impoſtor *Mahomet*, or that of *Alexander* as deſcribed by Lucian, or that of *Apollonius of Tyana;* and contraſt them with that of Chriſt, or any of his apoſtles; and you will at once perceive the difference between the manner in which impoſture and truth are introduced and eſtabliſhed in the world. Compare the miracles recorded in the New Teſtament,

with

with reſpect to their publicity, their beneficial tendency, and their influence on the thouſands who ſaw them, with the tricks of ancient or modern pretenders to magic; and you will at once perceive the difference between cunningly deviſed deluſions operating on fanatical minds, and the ſimplicity of goſpel wonders extorting conviction from the moſt incredulous. The apoſtles were as deſtitute of ability to deceive, as of inducement to impoſe a fable on the world. It requires great power, or great talents, to be a ſucceſsful impoſtor; and the difficulty is increaſed, when the plot cannot be carried on without the concurrence of many aſſiſtants; and eſpecially when it is to be carried on, in oppoſition to men able and willing to detect the cheat. What ſhould we think of twelve fiſhermen, who ſhould now undertake to proclaim, in the hearing of the learned and unlearned, that a few years ago a certain man wrought many miracles, not only in a diſtant country, but in the ſtreets and churches of the metropolis of the kingdom; not only before them, the relaters of the fact, but in the preſence of thouſands of others; and that this man was publicly tried by order of government, and

put

put to death in London; and that he roſe from the dead; and that after his reſurrection he was ſeen not only by themſelves, but by hundreds of others, and by ſome who were ſtill alive?—What ſhould we think of ſuch aſſertions, of ſuch audacious appeals to living witneſſes, when in truth this man had not riſen from the dead, nor wrought any miracle whatever?—What ſhould we think of twelve fiſhermen, who, without underſtanding any language but their own, ſhould go to Paris, Rome, Madrid, Conſtantinople, and endeavour to propagate the ſame thing? Is it credible that any men could be found ſo mad as to make the attempt, or that, if they did make it, they ſhould have the good fortune to ſucceed in their impoſition?

That a great part of the world is converted to chriſtianity, is a fact;—that the foundation of this converſion was laid by the apoſtles, is another fact;—that the apoſtles were men of mean connections, ſlender talents, ſlow apprehenſions; of powers, faculties, and diſpoſitions, utterly inadequate to the introducing and ſupporting an impoſture, are other facts, of which, when properly conſidered,

we cannot, it is apprehended, ſuffer ourſelves to doubt. If we admit the account, contained in the New Teſtament, concerning the means by which the chriſtian religion was eſtabliſhed, every thing is credible; if we reject it, every thing is incredible; no ſatisfactory reaſon can be aſſigned for the zeal, or for the ſucceſs of the apoſtles in propagating an untruth; their zeal will want a motive, and their ſucceſs will want a cauſe adequate to the effect.

Conſider farther, that there is no book now in the world, nor, as far as we know, ever was one, contradicting any of the facts recorded in the New Teſtament; but that there are ſeveral books, *written by men who were not chriſtians*, which confirm many of them: *Tacitus*, in particular, confirms a fact of principal importance; for he tells us, that Jeſus Chriſt was put to death by Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea.—There is not therefore any external teſtimony, that the writers of the New Teſtament have written a fable; if we refuſe to believe their narration, our refuſal, if it has any foundation beſide that of prejudice and ignorance

of

of the ſubject, muſt be built on ſomething contained in the New Teſtament itſelf; now every thing related in the New Teſtament, and eſpecially what is related concerning the conduct of the apoſtles, before and after the reſurrection of Jeſus, carries with it the ſtrongeſt proof of the honeſty of the writers of it; and if they were honeſt men, the chriſtian religion is true.

What would have been the conduct of diſhoneſt men, who had combined to cheat the world into a belief of what had never happened, into the adoption of a new religion of which they themſelves were to be the principal promoters? Would they have ever told to the world circumſtances ſo diſgraceful to their characters, as the evangeliſts have done? Impoſtors carefully conceal their ambition, their avarice, their cowardice, their inſincerity, their vices and imperfections of every kind, and make an oſtentatious diſplay of virtues and excellencies which they do not really poſſeſs. But the evangeliſts, having no deſign to deceive, relate, without diſguiſe, facts tending to lower their characters in the general eſtimation of

mankind. They tell us that there was a ſtrife among the apoſtles, which of them ſhould be the greateſt; and that, as intereſted and ambitious men are wont to do, they had all been very forward in profeſſing to Jeſus their ſtrong attachment to him—"that if they ſhould die with him, they would not deny him:"—they then proceed to inform us, diſgraceful as the account is, that in a very few hours after they had made theſe ſolemn profeſſions, when the moment of peril came, and their ſelfiſh views were blaſted,—"they all forſook him and fled."—This humiliating narrative is a proof of their veracity as hiſtorians, and their conduct on the occaſion is highly credible.

Notwithſtanding the long intimacy which the apoſtles of Jeſus had enjoyed with him; notwithſtanding the diſtinction with which they had been honoured by him; notwithſtanding the knowledge they had of the probity of his manners, of the purity of his doctrines, and of the greatneſs of his power in working miracles; notwithſtanding the promiſe he had made them of his going to prepare a place for them in his Father's king-

dom,

dom, of his riſing from the dead, of his returning to them again, and of his not leaving them comfortleſs; notwithſtanding theſe and many other circumſtances ſufficient, one might at firſt view have imagined, to have generated courage, and ſecured attachment in all his followers, yet they all abandoned him in his diſtreſs—"forſook him and fled—the ſhepherd was ſmitten, and the ſheep were ſcattered."

This conduct was extremely natural. The diſciples of Jeſus, and his apoſtles eſpecially, expected that their maſter would become a great temporal prince, and that they were to participate in the power, wealth, and honour, which he would at length attain. But when they ſaw him ſeized by his enemies, and dragged as a malefactor before the great council of the nation, they not only gave up their hopes of advancement, but were alarmed for their own perſonal ſafety; they yielded to fears inſeparable from humanity; and which are ſeldom overcome, except by perſons impreſſed with high notions of honourable reputation. This conduct of the apoſtles is ſo intirely conformable to what we every

day obſerve, that it forces, as it were, our aſſent to the truth of the narration. When the founder of a ſect in religion, or the leader of a faction in the ſtate, happens to fall into diſgrace, his adherents preſently begin to be ſhy of his acquaintance; and if he happens not merely to fall into diſgrace, but to be arreſted as a peſtilent diſturber of the public peace, then do they begin to avoid him; and if they cannot eſcape the ſuſpicion of being known to him, they begin, eſpecially if they be men of low education, to lie and to ſwear, as Peter did, that they know not the man, never had communication or connection with him.

Compare this ſelfiſhneſs and cowardice of the apoſtles, with the courage and diſintereſtedneſs which ſoon after adorned their character, and try if you can diſcover any ſufficient reaſon for ſo remarkable a change of conduct and principle.

Did Pilate, repenting of his wickedneſs, extend the protection of the civil power to the followers of Jeſus, whom, contrary to all the rules of civil juſtice, he had condemned

demned to death, though he confeſſed that he found no cauſe of death in him? No, we hear nothing of the repentance of Pilate.—Did the chief prieſts and elders of the Jewiſh people, repenting of the premeditated malice by which they had ſought the life of Jeſus, by which they had bribed Judas to betray innocent blood, by which they had intimidated Pilate to crucify a juſt perſon; did theſe men, ſtruck with remorſe, encourage the apoſtles to adhere to their crucified maſter? No, theſe men retained their malice after the object of it was removed, they perſecuted the apoſtles for preaching in the name of Jeſus.—Did the multitude, who a few days before his trial had uſhered Jeſus into Jeruſalem with triumphant acclamations of applauſe; who, at the time of his trial, as if drunk with fury, had cried out, "crucify him, crucify him, his blood be on us and our children;" did this multitude (as is not unuſual with multitudes to do) once more change their mind, and undertake the defence of the followers of that man, whom in their phrenzy they had murdered? No, we read nothing of the multitude becoming ſupporters of the apoſtles,

till the wonders and ſigns which were done by them, brought fear on every ſoul; the ſupport of the multitude was ſubſequent to the preaching of Peter and the apoſtles, it could not therefore have been the cauſe of their courage.—Joſeph of Arimathea was a diſciple of Chriſt, and a rich man; Nicodemus was a diſciple of Chriſt, and a powerful man, for he was a ruler of the Jews; did theſe or any other men by their wealth or authority inſpire the apoſtles with fortitude to face their enemies, and the enemies of their crucified Lord? No, nothing of this kind, but the contrary of it appears in the hiſtory; for it appears that the diſciples on the day of the reſurrection, and for ſome days afterwards, were ſo full of apprehenſion, that they aſſembled privately with the door of their apartment ſhut, for fear of the Jews. What was it then that cauſed the apoſtles to change their cowardice into courage, their deſertion into attachment, their aim at worldly advancement into a voluntary ſurrender of every worldly comfort, into a patient ſubmiſſion to every evil which could afflict human nature? What, but the conviction that their Lord was riſen from the

dead?

dead? This is a cauſe adequate to the effect; it is a miſuſe of time, and a perverſion of talents, to ſeek for any other. This conduct of the apoſtles before, and after the reſurrection of their Lord, is a ſtrong argument in ſupport of the truth of our holy religion.

Let us conſider more particularly the account which is given of their conduct. After the crucifixion of Jeſus, the apoſtles were obliged to ſtay at Jeruſalem at leaſt a week, that they might keep the paſſover according to the law; during this period Jeſus appeared twice to them when they were aſſembled together. After the feaſt was ended, they returned to their native country, Galilee; and Jeſus appeared to them, at the place he had before appointed: it is probable that he ſhewed himſelf frequently to them in that country, for he was ſeen of them forty days, ſpeaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. On the approach of the feaſt of Pentecoſt, or the feaſt of weeks, which, according to the law, was to be kept at Jeruſalem by all the Jews, fifty days after the celebration of the

paſſover, the apoſtles went from Galilee to Jeruſalem; and there they were again met by their maſter; who commanded them to ſtay at Jeruſalem, till they were endued with power from on high, till they were baptized by the Holy Ghoſt, which he aſſured them they would be in a little time. He gave them alſo their commiſſion—"Ye ſhall receive power, after that the Holy Ghoſt is come upon you, and ye ſhall be witneſſes unto me, both in Jeruſalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermoſt parts of the earth.—And when he had ſpoken theſe things, while they beheld he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their ſight."—A few days after this, they were all filled with the Holy Ghoſt, and enabled to ſpeak a variety of languages which they had never learned, and to work miracles ſurpaſſing all human power.

Now ſuppoſing the ſcripture account of the reſurrection of Jeſus; of his frequently appearing to his diſciples after his reſurrection; of his inſtructing them in the nature of his kingdom; of his giving them a commiſſion to bear witneſs concerning him to all the

the world; of his aſcending into heaven while they looked on him; of his ſending the Holy Ghoſt, by which they were enabled to ſpeak with tongues, and to work miracles; ſuppoſing theſe things to have really happened, what conduct would you have expected from the apoſtles? Preciſely that which they adopted. They no longer denied their maſter, no longer ſhut themſelves up in ſecret, no longer feared the Jewiſh rulers, no longer diſputed amongſt themſelves which of them ſhould have the firſt place in the kingdom of Chriſt; but relinquiſhing all earthly comfort, ſetting at defiance all oppoſition, braving all perſecution, they went through the world executing the commiſſion they had received, every where maintaining—that Jeſus of Nazareth, whilſt he was alive, was a man proved to be from God, by miracles which God did by him; that God raiſed him from the dead; that after his reſurrection they frequently converſed with him; that they ſaw him aſcend into heaven; and that they received from him the power of ſpeaking with tongues, and of working miracles.

Had Jeſus Chriſt never riſen from the dead, chriſtianity would, probably, never have been extended beyond the limits of Judea. His diſciples might have acquired a peculiar denomination, and would certainly have eſteemed him a great prophet; but not *the* prophet, not the Meſſiah, whom they expected to come into the world. In the interval between his death and his reſurrection, the minds of his apoſtles were perplexed with doubts concerning his being the perſon who was to reſtore Iſrael. They were ſo backward in crediting the reports which were brought to them of his reſurrection, that, it is evident, they either did not believe, or, in the tumult of their grief, did not advert to what he had told them of his riſing again the third day; and it is very probable that, if he had not riſen from the dead, his diſciples would have contented themſelves with reverencing, in ſecret, the memory of their maſter; they could not have doubted concerning the reality of the miracles which they had ſeen him perform; but they would neither have had the courage to attempt the converſion of the world to a dead man, nor the means to effect it.

Hiſtory affords many inſtances of men who have ſuſtained with fortitude the greateſt perſecutions in ſupport of opinions perfectly erroneous, as well as in ſupport of thoſe which are founded in truth. A Jew will ſooner be tortured by the inquiſition, and burned at the ſtake, than he will acknowledge Jeſus to be the Meſſiah. A chriſtian will ſuffer martyrdom, ſooner than he will deny that Jeſus is the Meſſiah. A Mahometan will ſooner be put to death, than he will own Mahomet to have been an impoſtor; and both Jews and Chriſtians will ſuffer any perſecution ſooner than they will acknowledge him to have been a prophet ſent from God. It is not only in theſe great points that human fortitude triumphs over pain and death; but there is no chriſtian ſect which cannot boaſt of numbers who would ſeal, I do not ſay, the truth, but their opinion of the truth, with their blood. Servetus was burned to death, becauſe he would not profeſs, that he believed Chriſt to be the eternal Son of God, though, in the midſt of the flames, he profeſſed that Chriſt was the Son of the eternal God;—and Calvin would have ſuffered the death which he made Servetus ſuffer, ſooner than he would have

have acknowledged, that Chriſt was not the eternal Son of the eternal God.—We learn from the hiſtory of fanaticiſm and ſuperſtition, that men have died martyrs to opinions unintelligible, abſurd, immoral, impious. All this may be allowed, but the inference, which is generally drawn by ſceptical men from ſuch obſervations, cannot be allowed; the inference is this—that the fortitude of the apoſtles, in ſuſtaining perſecution, is no proof of the truth of the chriſtian religion, inaſmuch as an equal degree of fortitude has often been diſplayed by other men in ſupport of opinions evidently not true.—This inference cannot be allowed for this reaſon—that an eſſential difference is to be made between him who dies in atteſtation of a matter of fact, and him who dies in atteſtation of an opinion. The apoſtles died in atteſtation of their having ſeen Jeſus work miracles, whilſt he was alive; and of their having converſed with him after his reſurrection from the dead. Theſe are not abſtruſe opinions, but things which either did, or did not happen; any man is competent to ſay whether he ſaw them happen or not; and the apoſtles died in maintaining that they did ſee them happen: they "were eye-witneſſes

of

of his majeſty." The chriſtian martyrs who had never ſeen Jeſus, nor been eye-witneſſes of any miracles wrought by him, or by others in his name, but who died, rather than they would abandon the belief which they had adopted, contributed, by their conſtancy, to the propagation of the chriſtian religion; but they did not eſtabliſh it's truth in the ſame way that the apoſtles did.

The chriſtians of the preſent age are ſtrong in opinion, that Jeſus was raiſed from the dead—the Jews and unbelievers of the preſent age are ſtrong in opinion, that Jeſus was not raiſed from the dead. Chriſtians and Jews, of all preceding ages, till we come to the very time when this great event —the reſurrection of Jeſus—either did or did not happen, have been uniform in their reſpective opinions, and both are now ready to ſhed their blood in ſupport of them; there is no hypocriſy in the profeſſion of either; what reaſon then has an impartial inquirer after truth to credit the chriſtian rather than the Jew?—He has this reaſon; the groundwork of the belief of the chriſtian is a matter of fact atteſted by eye-witneſſes; but the

ground-

groundwork of the belief of the Jew is an aſſertion deſtitute of proof. The Jews, who lived at the time when Jeſus either did or did not riſe from the dead, found the ſepulchre, in which his body had been laid, empty. The ſepulchre might have become empty two ways, either by the body having been raiſed from the dead, or by it's having been taken away. The Jews aſſerted that it was taken away by his diſciples, but they gave no proof of their aſſertion; they neither pretended to have ſeen it taken away, nor to have ſeen it after it had been taken away. The apoſtles alſo found the ſepulchre empty, but they did not, from that circumſtance, aſſert, that Jeſus was riſen from the dead; no, they aſſerted that they had ſeen him, handled him, eaten with him, converſed with him, not only once, but often, and in different places, after his reſurrection from the dead. Now, no one, who underſtands the nature of evidence, can heſitate in pronouncing, that the belief of the chriſtians of the preſent age, when traced back to it's origin, is founded on a rock, on the teſtimony of eye-witneſſes to a matter of fact; whilſt that of the Jews is

founded on an aſſertion of their anceſtors not only deſtitute of proof, but utterly incredible, as might eaſily be ſhewn from an examination of the circumſtances attending the crucifixion and interment of Jeſus.

Had the chief prieſts reported, that, in conſequence of the precautions they had taken, the body of Jeſus was on the third day after the crucifixion found in the ſepulchre; and had the apoſtles reported, that on the third day the body was not found in the ſepulchre, and ſaid no more upon the ſubject; the chriſtians and Jews of ſucceeding ages might, with ſome appearance of reaſon, have diſputed concerning the degree of credit due to the teſtimony of their reſpective progenitors. Yet, even on this ſuppoſition, the chriſtian would have had a better foundation for his belief, than the Jew could lay claim to; for the predeceſſors of the chriſtian ſacrificed their lives in ſupport of their teſtimony, but the predeceſſors of the Jew gave no ſuch proof of their ſincerity and truth.

The ſum of what has been ſaid amounts

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to this—we have as great, if not greater reaſon to believe, that the hiſtory of the life, death, and reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt, as related in the New Teſtament, is a genuine and authentic hiſtory, as we have to believe in the genuineneſs and authenticity of any other ancient book—we have no evidence external or internal to induce us to conclude, that the apoſtles had either ability or motive to introduce and propagate an impoſture. The ſelfiſhneſs, ambition, and cowardice of the apoſtles, ſhewn during the life, and at the death of Jeſus, are perfectly natural and credible; and when contraſted with their ſubſequent diſintereſtedneſs, humility, and fortitude, afford an exceeding ſtrong proof, both of the general veracity of the evangeliſts as hiſtorians, and of the fact of the reſurrection of Jeſus, as a cauſe adequate to the production of ſo great, and otherwiſe unaccountable change in their character and conduct.

A CHARGE,

A CHARGE, &c.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE pleaſure which I experience in meeting you on ſuch occaſions as the preſent, is always accompanied with ſome degree of anxiety. I am fearful, leſt I ſhould have nothing to produce to you worthy your attention, as ſcholars, and divines; and I think too well of your general good conduct, in the diſcharge of your parochial duties, to employ the time in reprehending you for faults, which, probably, do not exiſt; or in cautioning you againſt errors, to which you probably are not prone.

On a former occaſion I took the liberty of giving you my advice, on the neceſſity of your thoroughly examining the foundation on which your faith, as chriſtians, is built;

and I, at this time, repeat the advice with great earneſtneſs and ſincerity. An attack has been openly made in a foreign country, and is ſecretly carrying on in our own; not on modes of worſhip, or church diſcipline, not on diſputable articles of faith; not on any of the out-works of chriſtianity; but on the citadel itſelf. We know indeed, that this citadel is founded on a rock, which no human force can ſubvert; yet we are placed in it as ſentinels, to detect the artifice of thoſe who covertly undermine, and to repel the aggreſſion of thoſe who openly aſſail it; and we know the puniſhment which awaits ſoldiers ſleeping on their poſt.

There have been men in former ages, and there are not a few in our own, who think and ſpeak of the clergy, as deſtitute either of underſtanding, or honeſty; who repreſent them as intereſted in the ſupport of a ſuperſtition; and ready, at all times, to ſacrifice their probity as men, on the altar of profeſſional hypocriſy; who ſtigmatize them as the protectors of ignorance, and the perſecutors of ſcience. A philoſopher, ſays *Helvetius*, has for his enemies, the Bonzees, the Derviſes,

viſes, the Bramins, the miniſters of every religion in the world. Let us forgive theſe philoſophers, whether foreign or domeſtic, this wrong; but let us, at the ſame time, beg them to conſider—that we, as well as they, are ſubjects of a free ſtate, in which the road to wealth and diſtinction is open to every man of ability; and more open, perhaps, to men of ability in other profeſſions, than in that of the church—that we, as well as they, enjoy talents from the gift of God, and have been as ſedulous as themſelves, (ſpeaking without arrogance) in the improvement of them. Are they mathematicians, natural philoſophers, metaphyſicians, logicians, claſſical ſcholars? ſo are we.—I ſpeak not of individuals, much leſs of myſelf, but of the great body of the Britiſh clergy. There is not a ſingle branch of knowledge, in which the clergy are not equal, at leaſt, to thoſe who injuriouſly impute to them the groſſneſs of ignorance in believing an impoſture, or the more degrading and flagitious infamy of ſupporting what they do not believe.

It is true, that lawyers, phyſicians, ſoldiers, men in every profeſſion, are wont to acquire a partiality for that in which they have been educated; and by the almoſt irreſiſtible force of habit, think more highly of it's excellencies, and are diſpoſed to defend it's defects with more pertinacity than reaſon will allow. If a prepoſſeſſion of this kind ſhould be obſervable in the profeſſors of chriſtianity, or in the advocates for any particular ſyſtem of chriſtianity, a candid mind would be ready rather to apologize for the infirmity, than to condemn it, as ſpringing from a corrupted ſource of intereſt or ambition. What intereſt can an Unitarian or an Arian have in diſſenting from the faith eſteemed orthodox? If either, or both of them are in an error, may the mercy of God forgive them! but let not the unmerciful judgment of man condemn them.—What intereſt can a deiſt of upright morals (and there are many ſuch,) have in contending, that the Supreme Being gave no law to Moſes, no revelation of his will to mankind by Jeſus Chriſt; but that Moſes and the prophets, that Jeſus and the apoſtles were like

like Confucius, Zoroaſter, Numa, Mahomet, and their ſeveral aſſociates; that they pretended to a divine authority, which was not vouchſafed to them? We believe, that the divine miſſions of Moſes and of Jeſus may be eſtabliſhed, and that they have been repeatedly eſtabliſhed, by arguments, which are utterly inapplicable to every other religion which hath taken place among mankind; but we do not take upon us to anathematize, with fiery zeal, every one who does not believe as we do; we pray for his converſion to what we eſteem the truth, and we requeſt him to admit, that the ſincerity of our belief in chriſtianity is as great as that of his unbelief; if he thinks otherwiſe of us, he thinks amiſs; if he ſpeaks otherwiſe, he becomes a calumniator.

This moderation, which, on all occaſions, I recommend as proper for us to obſerve towards thoſe who differ from us, either partially, or wholly, and which, in return, we have a right to expect from them, is not to be interpreted into an indifference either towards chriſtianity in general, or towards that particular mode of it which is eſtabliſh-

ed in theſe kingdoms. The church of England may be maintained, and it is our duty to maintain it, with zeal regulated by charity, againſt all it's enemies, till they have convinced us, that a leſs defective ſyſtem of doctrine, worſhip, and diſcipline, might be peaceably introduced in it's ſtead; and this, if we may judge from what we have read of former times, or obſerved of our own, the oppoſers of the eſtabliſhment will not be able ſpeedily to accompliſh.

He who wiſhes to repair an ancient fortreſs, when he ſees it attacked by a thouſand enemies, disfigured by the rubbiſh of a thouſand ages, cannot, without great injuſtice, be ranked with thoſe who labour to overturn it.

Nor is the defence of the chriſtian religion abandoned, when we allow unbelievers the full liberty of producing all the arguments they can in ſupport of their infidelity. Our liberality in this reſpect proceeds not from any ſupineneſs, or inattention towards what we eſteem of ineſtimable value, but from a total diſlike of dogmatiſm, and intolerance; —prin-

—principles ill comporting with the weakneſs of human underſtanding, and with the benignity of the chriſtian religion; and from a ſtrong perſuaſion that the reſult of the moſt critical ſcrutiny into the foundations of our faith will be a confirmation of it's truth. The time I think is approaching, or is already come, when chriſtianity will undergo a more ſevere inveſtigation than it has ever yet done. My expectation, as to the iſſue, is this—that catholic countries will become proteſtant, and that proteſtant countries will admit a farther reformation. —In expreſſing this expectation, which I am far from having the vanity to propoſe with oracular confidence, I may poſſibly incur the cenſure of ſome, who think that proteſtantiſm, as eſtabliſhed in Germany, in Switzerland, in Scotland, in England, is, in all theſe, and in other countries, ſo perfect a ſyſtem of chriſtianity, that it is incapable of any amendment in any of them. If this ſhould be the caſe, I muſt conſole myſelf with reflecting, that the greateſt men could not, in their day, eſcape unmerited calumny. Every age has had it's Sacheverell's, it's Hickes's, and it's Chenells's; who, with the bitterneſs of theo-

logical odium, ſharpened by party rancour, have not ſcrupled to break the bonds of chriſtian charity. Hoadly was called a diſſenter, Chillingworth a Socinian, and Tillotſon both Socinian and atheiſt; and all of them experienced this obloquy, from contemporary zealots, on account of the liberality of their ſentiments, on account of their endeavouring to render chriſtianity more rational than it was in certain points generally eſteemed to be. I had certainly rather ſubmit to imputations, which even theſe great men could not avoid, than be celebrated as the mightieſt champion of the church on the ſyſtem of intolerance, or the moſt orthodox contender for the faith on the ſyſtem of thoſe who maintain, that our firſt reformers have left us no room for improvement in ſcriptural learning. With whatever aſſurance other men may be perſuaded, that they have attained certain knowledge of the truth of all chriſtian doctrines; with whatever zeal, in conſequence of that perſuaſion, they may foſter the ſeeds of perſecution, I confeſs that there are many points in theology on which I feel myſelf diſpoſed to adopt an expreſſion of St. Auſtin, when he is ſtating the different ways, in which he conjectures that original

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ſin may have been propagated from parents to children—*quid autem horum ſit verum libentius diſco, quam dico, ne audeam docere quod neſcio.*

Herodotus tells us, that *Darius* aſked ſome of the Greeks, what ſum of money he ſhould give them to eat the bodies of their deceaſed parents, after the manner of the Indians. Upon their refuſal to comply on any conſideration, he aſked ſome of the Indians, who were accuſtomed to eat the bodies of their parents, what ſum they would take to burn the bodies of their parents after the Grecian manner: but they, ſetting up a general outcry, deſired the king to have better thoughts of them. Thus it is in religion, every man is attached to the mode of worſhip, and the ſyſtem of doctrines, to which he has been accuſtomed, and he looks upon other modes, and other doctrines, as bordering on impiety. This diſpoſition is ſo general, that it may be conſidered as natural; yet, like many other natural propenſities, it may be corrected; it is an evil which may be overcome by good ſenſe. I call it an evil, becauſe it miſleads the judgment,

and

and ſubjects men to the tyranny of prejudice. It was a prejudice of this ſort which made St. Paul a perſecutor of Jeſus; which made the Jews perſecutors of the chriſtians; which made the heathens perſecutors of both Jews and chriſtians; and which has, at times, rendered the different denominations of chriſtians in this country, and in all other parts of chriſtendom, perſecutors of each other. There can be no queſtion that it is the duty of all men to oppoſe reaſon to prejudice; but, unluckily, every man thinks that he does ſo; he miſtakes his own concluſions for truths, which ought not to be diſputed, and which cannot be illuſtrated; and every argument tending to ſubvert them is rejected without examination. This perverſion of the underſtanding is a great reproach to men of education and learning; we may lament it and excuſe it in the bulk of mankind, who, letting their reaſon lie without exerciſe, go, on moſt occaſions, in matters of opinion, not in the way in which they ought to go, but in that which they have gone before. But in men habituated to the cultivation of their faculties, and to impartial inveſtigation in other branches of knowledge,

knowledge, this prepoſſeſſion in religion, the moſt important of all branches, is wholly reprehenſible.

The great diſputes, which at preſent agitate Europe, reſpect the firſt principle of natural religion, and the truth of all revealed religion. The firſt principle of natural religion is—the exiſtence of a God, the maker, the preſerver, and the moral governor of the univerſe. No created being can comprehend the eſſence of the divine nature, much leſs is it in the power of man to do it; but to deny the exiſtence of a God, is ſuch a degree of inſanity, as few men in any age have fallen into; and thoſe who have fallen into it, have been deſervedly looked upon as dangerous prodigies in nature.

Protagoras, a philoſopher of antiquity, we are told by *Cicero*, began a work with ſaying—" Whether there are Gods, or whether there are none, I have nothing certain to deliver on the ſubject." The Athenians, fired with indignation at this daring declaration of the ſophiſt's ſcepticiſm, baniſhed him

him from their city and territory, and burned his book before a public aſſembly of the people. In our days, a philoſopher has been heard to exclaim, in a ſolemn convention of his countrymen, "I am an atheiſt." Far from reſenting this public avowal of his impiety, his countrymen called out, "What is that to us? you are an honeſt man." I do not deny the poſſibility of an atheiſt being an honeſt man—*Spinoza* is ſaid to have been one—and I am an enemy to every degree of perſecution for opinion; but ſurely the people of Athens manifeſted, on a ſimilar occaſion, not only more piety, but infinitely more political wiſdom, than the people of Paris—for there has yet been no inſtance in the world, of a ſtate ſubſiſting without religion.

I think it unneceſſary to enter into any laboured proof of the Being and Providence of God before this audience; it is known, I preſume, to every one of you, my brethren, that the exiſtence of a Supreme Being may be eſtabliſhed from three different ſources of argumentation—from a metaphyſical conſideration of the abſurdity

abſurdity of an infinite ſeries of dependent beings—from the contemplation of the order and beauty of the univerſe—and from the conſent of all nations; which conſent has been derived by tradition from our firſt parents. Many writers, ancient and modern, have maintained, that the idea of God was implanted in our nature; they were driven to this expedient, which Mr. Locke has ſhewn to have no foundation, from their not having been able otherwiſe to account for that univerſal conſent, which prevailed not amongſt the learned only, but amongſt the unlearned part of mankind, concerning the Being of a God. Had they been acquainted with, or properly conſidered, the writings of *Moſes*, they would have ſeen the great facility with which a knowledge of the creation, and of the exiſtence of God, might have been diſſeminated throughout the world, by the deſcendants of *Noah*. All mankind are ſprung from a common ſtock, and all have retained, as might have been expected, ſome knowledge of the cauſe of their common origin. There was a time when I was fond of metaphyſical inquiries into the nature of the Supreme Being, and much delighted

lighted with the works of *Cudworth*, *King*, *Clarke*, *Leibnitz*, and other acute reaſoners on the ſubject; but I have long thought that the motions of the heavenly bodies, the propagation and growth of animals and plants, the faculties of the human mind, and even the ability of moving my hand up or down, by a ſimple volition, afford, when deliberately reflected on, more convincing arguments againſt atheiſm, than all the recondite lucubrations of the moſt profound philoſophers. In a word, the argument for the exiſtence of God, which is drawn from the contemplation of nature, is ſo clear and ſo ſtrong, that the moſt ignorant can comprehend it, and the moſt learned cannot invent a better. This argument is ſo obvious to a thinking mind, that I ſuſpect the accuracy of *Cicero*'s information, when he tells us that *Anaxagoras* was the firſt, who taught that the univerſe was formed by an Intelligent Mind, diſtinct from matter. He himſelf, indeed, gives reaſon for this ſuſpicion, when he obſerves, that *Thales*, the predeceſſor of *Anaxagoras*, maintained (probably from ſome tradition concerning the creation) that God was that mind

mind which formed all things out of water. I will conclude this head with a paſſage from *Chardin*'s travels into *Perſia*, as cited by *Fabricius*; it may be better remembered, as an argument againſt atheiſm, than a more acute diſquiſition would be.

The Mahometans, ſays this author, have invented many fabulous accounts concerning the prophets and the patriarchs of the Old Teſtament; amongſt the reſt, they tell us—that *Moſes* having preached a long time to king Pharaoh, who was an atheiſt and a tyrant, on the exiſtence of one eternal God, and on the creation of the world; and finding that he made no impreſſion either upon Pharaoh or his courtiers; ordered a fine palace to be erected privately, at a conſiderable diſtance from a country reſidence of the king. It happened that the king, as he was a hunting, ſaw this palace, and inquired by whom it had been built. None of his followers could give him any information; at length Moſes came forward, and ſaid to him—that the palace muſt certainly have built itſelf. The king fell a laughing at his abſurdity, telling him that it was a pretty thing,

thing, for a man who called himſelf a prophet, to ſay that ſuch a palace had built itſelf in the middle of a deſert. Moſes interrupted him with ſaying, "You think it a ſtrange extravagance to affirm that this palace built itſelf, the thing being impoſſible; and yet you believe that the world made itſelf. If this fine palace, which is but an atom in compariſon, could not ſpring from itſelf in this deſert, how much more impoſſible is it that this world, ſo ſolid, ſo great, ſo admirable in all it's parts, could be made by itſelf, and that it ſhould not, on the contrary, be the work of an Architect wiſe and powerful!" The king was convinced, and worſhipped God, as Moſes had inſtructed him to do. There is much good ſenſe in this fable, and it's ſubſtance is thus expreſſed by *Cicero—quod ſi mundum efficere poteſt concurſus atomorum, cur porticum, cur templum, cur domum, cur urbem non poteſt?*

When we ſpeak concerning the truth of revealed religion, we include not only the certainty of the divine miſſions of Moſes and of Jeſus, but the nature of the ſeveral doctrines promulgated by them to mankind.

kind. Now you may aſk me, what theſe doctrines are? I know what they are to me; but, pretending to no degree of infallibility, I think it ſafer to tell you where they are contained, than what they are. They are contained in the bible; and if, in the reading of that book, your ſentiments concerning the doctrines of chriſtianity ſhould be different from thoſe of your neighbour, or from thoſe of the church, be perſuaded on your part, that infallibility appertains as little to you, as it does to the church of which you are a member, or to any individual who differs from you. Towards the church you ought to preſerve reverence and reſpect; and in your public teaching, you ought not, whilſt you continue a miniſter in it, to diſturb the public peace, by oppoſition to it's doctrines; and towards individuals, of whatever denomination of chriſtians they may be, who differ from you, you ought to preſerve charity of thought, and courteſy of conduct; and if you do this, your diſcordance of opinion will be attended with no miſchief public or private.

Many learned men have beſtowed much uſeleſs labour in defining, what are the fundamental verities of the chriſtian religion; uſeleſs I eſteem it, becauſe the ſame things are not fundamental to all men, and there is no infallible judge of controverſy to ſettle the diſputes which may ariſe. A papiſt believes the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation, of worſhipping of images, of invocation of ſaints, of purgatory, of the infalvability (if the word may be admitted) of heretics, and of the infallibility of popes, councils, and churches, to be fundamental doctrines:—a proteſtant does not believe any of theſe doctrines to be fundamental. Proteſtants differ from each other in their ſentiments concerning the euchariſt, concerning the trinity, concerning ſatisfaction, original ſin, and perſonal predeſtination;—but the wiſeſt amongſt them do not eſteem any particular opinion concerning any of theſe points, to be ſo fundamentally right, that ſalvation will not belong to thoſe who think otherwiſe.

Perſonal predeſtination appears to many to be a doctrine full of impiety and deſpair.

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They think it impious, as it repreſents God to be a blind or malignant Being—blind, if he dooms a man to eternal deſtruction without knowing whether he will do good or evil; and malignant, if knowing he makes no diſtinction, in his decrees, between them who obey and them who diſobey him. They think it a doctrine pregnant with deſpair—for now to be perſuaded that you are inevitably doomed to everlaſting puniſhment, that no future rectitude of conduct, no penitence for what is paſt, no ſupplication, no interceſſion, nothing which can be done by yourſelf, or by any other for you, can in the leaſt avail to the altering of your fate; what is this, ſay they, but to overwhelm the ſoul with the blackneſs of deſpondent horror? Is it not, they aſk, a more impious doctrine than that of Epicurus? for that repreſented God as not troubling himſelf in the government of the world, as making no diſtinction between the righteous and the wicked, as ſuffering both to die and become extinct; but this repreſents him, as conſigning to everlaſting torments, thoſe whom he had from all eternity determined to condemn. This doctrine, which St. *Chry-*

Joſtom amongſt the ancients, and *Arminius* amongſt the moderns, reprobated as unworthy of God, has been zealouſly maintained by *Calvin*, and St. *Auſtin*. In my humble judgment, they have done great ſervice to chriſtianity, who have endeavoured to ſhew that it is not founded in ſcripture. For nothing has contributed more to the propagation of deiſm, than the making doctrines abhorrent from reaſon, parts of the chriſtian ſyſtem. There may be doctrines above reaſon; but nothing, which is evidently contrary to reaſon, can ever be juſtly conſidered as a part of the chriſtian diſpenſation.—I will inſtance in another point.

A deiſt ſtumbles at the very threſhold of religion, and turns with ſcorn and terror from the temple of God, when he is told that he cannot enter into it but through the gate of original ſin, as deſcribed by *Fulgentius*, the diſciple of St. *Auſtin*. He admits original ſin in a certain ſenſe, acknowledging that it is not contrary to reaſon, that the whole human race ſhould, from the tranſgreſſion of Adam, become ſubject to labour, diſeaſe, and death; but he bids us combine into

into one idea whatever we have read of the Manichean doctrine concerning an evil principle, of the ſanguinary tenets of the worſhippers of Moloch, of the cruel ſuperſtitions of paganiſm in every age and country; and he defies us to form any thing ſo hideous to imagination, ſo repugnant to reaſon, ſo deſtructive of every juſt notion of a Supreme Being, as the doctrine of an orthodox father of the chriſtian church, concerning original ſin. The doctrine, in the words of Fulgentius, ſtands thus—*firmiſſime tene, et nullatenus dubites, parvulos, ſive in uteris matrum vivere incipiunt et ibi moriuntur, ſive cum de matribus nati ſine ſacramento ſancti baptiſmatis de hoc ſeculo tranſeunt, ignis æterni ſempiterno ſupplicio puniendos.*— Parent of univerſal good! merciful Father of the human race! how hath the benignity of thy nature been miſrepreſented! how hath the goſpel of thy Son been miſinterpreted by the burning zeal of preſumptuous man! I mean not, on this occaſion, to enter into the various queſtions which learned men have too minutely diſcuſſed, concerning the lapſe of our firſt parents, the original rectitude, and ſubſequent depravation of human

nature; I ſimply mean to ſay, that a propoſition which aſſerts, that infants dying in the womb will be tormented in everlaſting fire, on account of Adam's tranſgreſſion, is a propoſition ſo entirely ſubverſive of all our natural notions of the juſtice and mercy of the Supreme Being, that it cannot be admitted, unleſs a paſſage in ſcripture could be produced, in which it is clearly, and in ſo many words revealed; and I am certain that no ſuch paſſage can be produced.

The goſpel was preached to the poor, to ignorant and unlearned men; it's leading doctrines concerning providence, a reſurrection from the dead, and a future ſtate of retribution, are ſo obvious, that no one who can read the ſcriptures can fail to ſee them. Can it be a matter of ſurpriſe then, that a reluctance is felt againſt the admiſſion of abſtruſe doctrines, which require the ſubtlety of argute logic, and ſcholaſtic diſquiſition, to diſcover and enforce them? When men are deſirous of forming ſyſtems, they are apt to collect together a number of texts, which, being taken as abſtract propoſitions, ſeem to eſtabliſh the point; but which, when interpreted

preted by the context, appear to have no relation to it. There is no greater ſource of error than this practice; it has prevailed in the chriſtian church from the earlieſt ages, and it ſtill prevails. We owe to it the corruptions of popery, and that infinity of hereſies, which have ſo much debaſed the ſimplicity of goſpel-truth, and driven ſo many men of ſenſe from embracing chriſtianity. I am far from conſidering unbelievers as devoid of ability, or of integrity. I think they have not given the ſubject an unprejudiced and ſerious examination; and that the principal matters to which they object are the doctrines of men, rather than the commands of God. Every one who will well weigh the ſubject, muſt perceive the unfairneſs with which men uſually proceed, in forming ſyſtems in theology. By ſtringing together detached ſentences, an *Auſonius* may compel the chaſte *Virgil* to furniſh materials for an indecent poem; and, from the bible itſelf, a ſyſtem of impiety might, by ſuch means, be extracted.

But there is no doctrine of our holy religion, which has given greater offence to

unbelievers, or occaſioned greater perplexity to ſincere chriſtians, than the doctrine of ſatisfaction. Why might not God have reſtored human kind to the immortality which was loſt by the tranſgreſſion of Adam, without requiring any atonement, ſatisfaction, or price of redemption? Can the benevolent Author of the univerſe be induced, by the death of an innocent being, to beſtow a bleſſing on mankind, which, without ſuch a ſacrifice, he would have withheld from them? Does God Almighty, like the demons of pagan ſuperſtition, delight in blood?—Theſe, and innumerable other queſtions ſuch as theſe, obtrude themſelves on the reluctant minds of pious and thinking men; and they are the rocks on which impious and unthinking men make ſhipwreck of their faith. There is one general anſwer which may be given to them all; and it is an anſwer in which intelligent and ſober men will acquieſce—our incapacity to comprehend the ways of the Almighty.—What mortal knoweth for what we are reſerved in another world? Who can deſcribe the means requiſite for exalting our preſent human nature to that degree of angelic

angelic excellence, without which it may not be poſſible for us to participate in the joys of heaven? Who hath ſuch an inſight into the paſt, preſent, and future diſpenſations of God—into the relation which this ſtate bears to a future one—into the connection which the human race may *now* have, though unknown to us, or may hereafter have, though it hath not now, with other orders of beings, as poſitively to pronounce, that the blood of Chriſt was not requiſite to remove from mankind the conſequences of Adam's tranſgreſſion? We know aſſuredly, that God delighteth not in blood; that he hath no cruelty, no vengeance, no malignity, no infirmity of any paſſion in his nature; but we do not know, whether the requiſition of an atonement for tranſgreſſion, may not be an *emanation of his infinite mercy*, rather than a *demand of his infinite juſtice*. We do not know, whether it may not be the very beſt means of preſerving the innocence and happineſs, not only of us, but of all other free and intelligent beings. We do not know, whether the ſuffering of an innocent perſon may not be productive of a degree of good, infinitely ſurpaſſing the

evil

evil of ſuch ſufferance; nor whether ſuch a *quantum* of good could by any other mean have been produced. The death of Chriſt was voluntary; he laid down his own life, that he might give life to all mankind. This, no doubt, was a great inſtance of his love, and is a great motive for our gratitude, and ought to be a great incentive to holineſs of life, ſince tranſgreſſion was expiated by ſo great a ſacrifice. But was God cruel, unmerciful, unjuſt in accepting this voluntary ſuffering of Chriſt as an inſtrument of our ſalvation? No, certainly; this muſt not be admitted, unleſs it could be ſhewn, which never can be ſhewn, that our ſalvation could have been accompliſhed, and to the ſame extent, by other leſs valuable means—unleſs it could be ſhewn, which never can be ſhewn, that more evil than good, either to Chriſt himſelf, to the human race, or to ſome other part of God's creation, has flowed from the death of Chriſt. I like not that arrogant theology, which preſumes to explore what *angels deſire to look into*, and which failing in it's attempt, rejects as abſurd what it is not able to underſtand.

If God thought fit to accept for our redemption any price, there is nothing, that we know of, but his own wiſdom which could determine what price he would accept. Hence I ſee no difficulty in admitting, that the death of an angel, or of a mere man, might have been the price which God fixed upon. The *Socinians* contend that Chriſt was a man, who had no exiſtence before he was born of Mary; but they ſeem to me not to draw a juſt conſequence, when from thence they infer, that an atonement could not have been made for the ſins of mankind by the death of Jeſus. The *Arians* maintain, that Jeſus had an exiſtence before he was born of Mary; and there is no reaſon for thinking, that the death of ſuch a being might not have made an atonement for the ſins of mankind. All depends on the appointment of God; and if, inſtead of the death of a ſuper-angelic, of an angelic, or of an human being, God had fixed upon any other inſtrument, as a medium of reſtoring man to immortality, it would have been highly improper in us to have quarrelled with the mean which his goodneſs had appointed, merely becauſe we could not ſee

how

how it was fitted to attain the end. *God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life :—he ſent him into the world to be a propitiation for our ſins;* and it is our duty to believe that the death of Chriſt was the fitteſt *ranſom* which could have been provided for our *redemption*, though we may not be able, from our great ignorance, fully to comprehend it's peculiar expediency.

With great humility, and ſelf-abaſement, does it become us to think and ſpeak of every diſpenſation of God; we cannot fathom the depth of his councils, we cannot reach the ſublimity of his deſigns, we cannot apprehend the wiſdom of the means by which he worketh out the happineſs of the univerſe. In fine, my brethren, it is our duty freely to examine the meaning of the words in which God has revealed his will, leſt we ſhould be led, by the authority of men, to adopt ſuperſtitious opinions as divine truths; but it is not conſiſtent with good ſenſe to reject every thing which we cannot comprehend; the extent of our intellectual

capacity

capacity is extremely circumſcribed, and we fall into a dangerous deluſion, when we affect to make it commenſurate with the wiſdom of the Almighty; *thinking ourſelves to be ſomething, when* in fact *we are nothing, we deceive ourſelves,* and lead others into error.

FINIS.

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